

1960s Doctor Don Ervin

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Many Fairbury residents remember the Fairbury medical doctors in the 1960s, including Dr. Sauer, Dr. Marshall, Dr. Novak, Dr. Ervin, and Doctor Hudgens. Doctor Don Ervin published a book in 2012 describing his time as a Fairbury doctor from 1960 until he moved to Colorado in 1970. He recounted many humorous stories about his time as a Fairbury doctor in the book.

Don Ervin was born in Effingham in 1930. His parents were Mark and Sylvia Pearl Bolin Ervin. Don graduated from Vandalia High School. He completed pre-medical coursework at Southern Illinois University and attended Millikin University for 3 years. He was admitted to the University of Illinois Medical School on the condition that he practice medicine for five years in a town of less than 5,000 people after becoming a doctor.

After he interned at St. Joseph's Hospital in Marshfield, Wisconsin, he served two years in the Army, mostly at Fort Riley in Kansas. After his military service, he practiced privately in Oregon, Illinois, for a year and a half.

In January of 1960, the Blade published an article announcing that Dr. Don Ervin was beginning his general medical practice at the Sauer-Marshall-Novak Clinic in Fairbury and Forrest.

In his autobiography, Dr. Ervin recounted that in late 1959, he saw an ad in a medical journal from a former medical school friend and decided to investigate. The ad was an offer to join a three-man group in Fairbury, a very small town in central Illinois, with a starting salary of \$1,000/month, about \$300 more than he was making. Dr. Ervin recounted that Fairbury turned out to be an old-fashioned farm town with one main street. Most businesses still had high metal roofs over their sidewalks, so it looked like a town from an old western movie. Dr. Ervin observed that all three Fairbury doctors were very competent and were very busy. Dr. Ervin was most impressed by the town's 100-bed modern hospital.

When Dr. Ervin moved to Fairbury, his wife, Ardith, and their two children accompanied him. They had their third child while they were living in Fairbury.

Dr. Ervin recounted that he was very lucky that one of his earliest Fairbury cases went very well. The patient was an elderly lady who lived in a house trailer. He examined her and recognized she was suffering from a thyroid problem. He confirmed his suspicion with a blood test, and then he prescribed medicine which dramatically improved her condition. Her two daughters were very prominent in the community, and they quickly spread the word about this great new doctor in Fairbury.

Within a year of arriving in Fairbury, Dr. Ervin became extremely busy. He usually saw 20-25 patients each day in the office, made 3-5 house calls, and performed 2-3 major surgeries and 3-5 minor surgeries each week. He delivered around 80 babies every year and usually had 15-20 patients in the hospital at any given time. That heavy workload required Dr. Ervin to work about 80 hours per week. It was unusual for Dr. Ervin to sleep through the night without having to make a house call or go to the hospital at least once.

FEE SCHEDULE	
<i>Circa 1965</i>	
Office visit	\$2
Hospital visit	\$5
House call, day or night	\$5
Emergency room visit	\$10
Tracheotomy	\$50
Exchange transfusion	\$25
OB delivery	\$100
C section	\$200
Appendectomy	\$100
Hysterectomy	\$200
Hernia repair	\$100
Cholecystectomy (gall bladder)	\$200
T&A (tonsils and adenoids)	\$50

Dr. Ervin and his partners built a new clinic at the southwest corner of Walnut and Fourth Streets. Dr. Ervin recounted that beautiful, well-designed building, which improved the doctors' efficiency considerably. The practice expanded from three examining rooms to

eight and added a well-equipped lab, X-ray, minor surgery, and pharmacy. There was a phone in every examining room because the doctors had to be readily available to the hospital and should personally respond to urgent calls. The front office of the new clinic could direct urgent incoming calls to the room where the doctor was.

The new clinic also wrote its own prescriptions. Often, the doctor on call had to go to the clinic on weekends to get the right prescription and give it to the patient. Dr. Ervin came up with an idea to reduce the number of trips that doctors had to make to the clinic. He put the most commonly needed medications in numbered boxes and left them in the vestibule box at the clinic. When a patient called on a weekend, the doctor on call could tell the patient to go to the clinic and pick up the right-numbered box of medication. The patients were totally amazed that the doctor already had their medication ready for them to pick up when they called.

Dr. Ervin recounted that his system worked very well until someone, probably the owner of the local drugstore, reported it to the state authorities. Dr. Ervin was called to Springfield and instructed to stop doing it or lose his medical license. Dr. Ervin reluctantly stopped using this system.

In 1963, Dr. Joe Novak left Fairbury to become the medical director of an insurance company in Chicago. That left Dr. Ervin to deal with his practice and Dr. Novak's practice. In the following nine months, Dr. Ervin only had three days off.

After much effort, Dr. Ervin finally recruited a new partner, Glenn Hudgens, who had just completed his internship. Dr. Ervin recounted that Dr. Hudgens was a great partner and a wonderful person. The two doctors practiced together for eight years, during which Dr. Hudgens became a good surgeon.

In 1970, Dr. Ervin was 40 years old and married to his wife Ardith, who was 34. They had three children. In his autobiography, Dr. Ervin recounted that his wife was very attractive but "high maintenance". She required a lot of attention, recognition, and money to indulge her whims.

In 1970, Mrs. Ervin decided to take some college classes at Churchill College in Pontiac. In August of 1970, Dr. Ervin recounted that he discovered his 34-year-old wife was having a torrid affair with a much younger male fellow student. Dr. Ervin was completely devastated and heartbroken. His carefully built world came crashing down around him.

Mr. and Mrs. Ervin remained married, and they moved their family to Colorado in 1970. Just a few years later, they divorced in Colorado. Dr. Ervin had a long and happy

relationship with St. Joseph's Hospital, culminating in his becoming the hospital's vice-president.

Dr. Don Ervin published his autobiography, *A Country Doctor: Small Town Medical Practice in the Nineteen Sixties*, in 2012. He passed away in April 2015 at the age of 85, about 3 years after publishing his book.

Dr. Ervin's book contains many humorous stories about Fairbury. Some of these stories will be recounted in a future Fairbury history story by the author. A copy of Dr. Ervin's book is in the reading room of the Fairbury Echoes Museum. The museum is at 126 W. Locust Street and is open on Thursdays and Fridays from one to four PM and Saturdays from nine to eleven AM.

